

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS  
OF  
2000 EVERYDAY PAIRED CHINESE IDIOMS

# 常用成对惯用语 英译2000例

邢锡范 编著

 辽宁教育出版社

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# 前 言

成对惯用语因其具有结构严谨，语言精练，含义深刻，音调和谐，容易上口，便于记忆，富于哲理性和表现力等特点，被人们广泛运用于口语和书面语之中，在传情达意方面起着极其重要的作用，可以说是汉语中的瑰宝。

在当前这个国内“英语热”、国外“汉语热”不断升温，“保卫汉语”之声不绝于耳的时代，如何在学习和交流中充分体现成对惯用语这些汉语精华，充分发挥它们的作用，就成为人们十分关注的话题。

成对惯用语数量很大，这本《常用成对惯用语英译2000例》收集了2000多例结构对称的常用惯用语，按字数分为三字、四字、五字、六字、七字和八字六部分予以编排。它的编著旨在给广大英语学习者和翻译工作者提供一些方便，同时也考虑了外国人学习汉语的实际需要。本书所收词条力求做到广泛，多样，充实，可靠。译文切合汉语词义，尽量保留汉语色彩，同时符合英语表达习惯。译文以直译为主，兼收意译和套译，以供读者选择使用。

由于本人的水平有限，虽然熬心费力地广收博采，扒梳抉剔，但书中一定还存在某些疏漏和错误的地方，恳切希望读者批评指正。

编 者

2006年12月

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## 三字成对惯用语

### A

爱情真，不变心 The heart that once truly loves never forgets.  
按比例，高速度 in proportion and at high speed

### B

摆事实，讲道理 present the facts and reasons out/set forth the facts and reasons/set forth the facts and use reasoned arguments/state the facts and reasons

板是板，眼是眼 (what he says) is well presented  
帮大忙，效大劳 render truly valuable service  
不藏奸，不耍滑 neither harbour evil intentions nor act in a slick way  
不成功，便成仁 succeed, or die to preserve virtue  
不迟到，不早退 never be late (for work) and never leave early  
不愁吃，不愁穿 not have to worry about food and clothing  
不夸大，不缩小 with nothing added and nothing removed/neither exaggerating nor understating

不怕官，就怕管 fear not officials—except when they officiate/fear not officials—except those who officiate over you/It is the man in direct control that is to be reckoned with, however low his position is.

不怕苦，不怕累 fear neither hardship nor fatigue  
不怕慢，就怕站 A slow progress holds promise, put to stand still fore-shadows failure. /Better late than never. /Be not afraid of going slowly, be only afraid of standing still. /It's better to go slowly than just to mark time. /We don't worry about being slow, but about halting.

不怕天，不怕地 fear neither heaven nor earth  
不怕痛，不怕丑 not afraid of being hurted or losing face  
不怕晚，只怕懒 Better late than never. /We don't worry about being late, but about being lazy.

不受捧，不怕压 withstand both flattery and pressure  
不为名，不为利 seek no (neither) fame nor gain/with no thought of fame or profit/not work for fame or fortune/without any regard for personal fame or gain/think neither of fame nor of personal gain

不信天，不信命 believe in neither heaven nor fate  
不自由，毋宁死 Give me liberty or give me death.

## C

踩一头，翘一头 As soon as one trouble is settled another crops up.  
察其言，观其行 examine his words and watch his deeds/check what he says against what he does 参见“听其言，观其行”  
查皇历，择吉日 gaze into one's crystal ball and choose an auspicious day  
拆东墙，补西墙 tear down the east wall to repair the west wall—resort to a makeshift solution/pulling down a wall in the east for bricks to build a wall in the west/keep up in one place at the expense of others/borrow from Peter to pay Paul  
陈谷子，烂芝麻 stale old yarn/stale topics of conversation as those about old millet or rotten sesame  
吃不了，兜着走 get more than one has bargained for/land oneself in serious trouble/be left holding the bag  
吃大苦，耐大劳 bear great hardship and stand great hardwork  
吃大亏，上大当 be badly fooled and suffer severely  
吃香的，喝辣的 have tasty food and strong drinks—eat well  
吃一堑，长一智 a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit/a fall in a pit, a gain in wit/Wisdom grows out of experience. /Experience bought by suffering teaches wisdom. 参见“经一事，长一智”  
出大力，流大汗 put forth one's strength and sweat  
穿大街，走小巷 through a maze of streets and crooked lanes  
穿新鞋，走老路 wear new shoes but walk old paths/wear new shoes but take the old roads/new-fangled forms but the old stuff/old wine in new bottles/make no real change  
吹胡子，瞪眼睛 snort and stare in anger  
吹喇叭，抬轿子 blow the trumpet and carry sb in a sedan chair—flatter (rich and influential people) /sing the praises of/boost  
辞旧岁，迎新年 ring out the old and ring in the new



此一时，彼一时 that was one situation and this is another—times have

changed/It is different now from then. /other times, other manners/That was one time and this is another. 也说“彼一时，此一时”

## D

- 打是亲，骂是爱 Lover's quarrels are a renewal of love.  
 打进来，拉出去 send sb in or recruit sb from one's ranks  
 大的大，小的小 The big ones are too big while the small ones are too small.  
 当面锣，对面鼓 debate face to face/do (say) sth to sb's face/negotiate directly and argue face to face  
 刀对刀，枪对枪 sword against sword and spear against spear  
 刀子嘴，豆腐心 a sharp-tongued person with a kind heart/ (have) a sharp tongue but a soft heart  
 登泰山，观日出 ascend Mountain Taishan to enjoy the sight of the sunrise  
 丁是丁，卯是卯 keep the Ding (a heavenly stem) from the Mao (an earthly branch) /fastidiously accurate/very definite/be conscientious and meticulous/be accurate in what one says (works)  
 顶风雪，战严寒 face blizzards and brave severe cold  
 东不成，西不就 cannot or will not accept post and be without job/One isn't the right, the other also—be fastidious (hypercritical)  
 东家长，西家短 gossip about other people 参见“张家长，李家短”  
 东一个，西一个 lie (scatter) here and there/spread everywhere/ (of things) be scattered here and there  
 东一句，西一句 first sentence about one thing and the next about another/to drag in irrelevant matters/talk incoherently  
 动脑筋，想办法 rack our brains to find ways and means  
 动天地，泣鬼神 so moving as to earth-shaking and soul-stirring 参见“惊天地，泣鬼神”  
 对敌狠，对己和 be hostile to an enemy and warm to a friend/be ruthless to the enemy and kind to one's comrades  
 多吃饭，少开口 keep (save) one's breath to cool one's porridge  
 多种花，少栽刺 plant more flowers and fewer thorns—adopt a placatory attitude and avoid offending people  
 多子女，多劳累 The more children one has the more he toils.  
 多做事，少说话 More done and less talk 参见“少说空话，多干实事”

## E

耳不聋，眼不花 (of an old person) be neither hard of hearing nor dim-



sighted

耳不听，心不烦 When the ear does not listen, the heart escapes sorrow (vexation). /hear nothing and sorrow nothing 参见“眼不见，心不烦”

二八月，乱穿衣 In the second and eighth lunar months (the season is changing), there are no rules of dress/dress freely when the season is changing.

## F

发了狂，红了眼 in a great frenzy

放长线，钓大鱼 angle for a large fish with a long line/go after sth big with foresight/throw a long line to catch a big fish/adopt a long-term plan to secure sth big/fly at higher game/pay out the line to catch a big fish/keep sb as bait for bigger fish

飞鸟尽，良弓藏 Danger past, God forgotten. /The good bow is put away when the birds have been shot down. 参见“狡兔死，走狗烹”

风里来，雨里去 go through wind and rain/come in the wind and go in the rain/carry out one's task even in the teeth of wind and rain

父不父，子不子 Fathers neglect their duties as fathers while sons neglect their duties as sons.

扶上马，送一程 help sb get on the horse and escort him for a distance/ (of a retired veteran) help a new appointee to get familiar with his or her post by serving as advisor for a while

## G

干打雷，不下雨 thunder but no rain/much noise but no action/all talk and no cider/great boast, small roast

感天地，动神明 influence heaven and earth, and move gods

干一行，爱一行 love whatever job one takes up/love whatever work you are doing

干一行，吃一行 One's profession is one's livelihood.

干一行，怨一行 Everybody condemns his own profession. 参见“在一行，怨一行”

干一行，钻一行 try to be proficient in whatever one does

高标准，严要求 high standards and strict in discipline

高不成，低不就 be unfit for a higher post but unwilling to take a lower one/can't have one's heart's desire but won't stoop to less/to be unable to attain the best yet unwilling to make do with the second best/ (of people looking for life partners or jobs) too choosy to succeed

高一阵，低一阵 sometimes rise high and sometimes subside like the

waves of the sea

搞阴谋, 施诡计 try tricks and plots (in an attempt to...)

跟好人, 学好人 Keep good men company and you shall be of the number.

公是公, 私是私 Business is business, friends are friends.

狗咬狗, 两嘴毛 When dog bites dog each gets a mouthful of fur—usually indicating unjustifiable disputes.

挂羊头, 卖狗肉 hang out a sheep's head while selling dog's flesh/cry up wine and sell vinegar/sell horsemeat as beefsteak/pass off fish-eyes as pearls/hang out a sheep's head but actually sell dog's meat/palm sth off on sb/He applied bait-and-switch tactics in business.

怪张三, 怨李四 go around blaming everybody

观行情, 摸气候 see how the wind blows to know the weather

观其行, 知其人 The deed proves the man.

观其友, 知其人 A man is known by the company he keeps.

光许愿, 不供献 make promises but never keep them/pay lip service

国易治, 家难齐 It is easy to rule a country, but it is difficult to control a family.

过五关, 斩六将 experience many hardships/surmount numerous difficulties/force five passes and slay six captains—win glory in battle

过一天, 算一天 muddle along with no thought of tomorrow/while away the days/come day, go day/live from hand to mouth 参见“走一步, 算一步”

## H

撼山岳, 泣鬼神 so moving as to shake the mountains and wring tears from the spirits

好一句, 歹一句 use all means of persuasion/plead with sb in every way one can

合则存, 分则亡 United, we stand; divided, we fail. /United we shall exist, and divided we shall perish.

横不是, 竖不是 feel out of place

花木瓜, 空好看 the prettiest papayas are emptiest inside

花如海, 歌如潮 A sea of flowers, a tidal wave of songs

化悲痛, 为力量 turn grief into strength

化腐朽, 为神奇 make the ugly beautiful/make use of discarded things

化干戈, 为玉帛 bury the hatchet and work for peace

画鬼易, 画人难 easier to paint a ghost than a man

活到老, 学到老 study all one's life/live and learn/One is never too old

to learn. /learn as long as one lives

## J

**既来之，则安之** Let's cross the bridge when we come to it. /Since you are here you'd better relax. /Now that you're here, you may as well stay and make the best of it. /Since this is so, it's better to accept it. /Now that we have come, let us stay and take the rough with the smooth.

**记得快，忘得快** Soon remembered, soon forgotten. 参见“学得快，忘得快”

**家里事，家里了** What happens in the family should be settled in the house.

**家有老，是个宝** An aged person always is a jewel in his/her family.

**假和平，真备战** peace in words, war preparation in deeds/pay lip service to peace but prepare for war in deeds

**假团结，真分裂** unity in name, splitting in reality

**见小利，失大义** lost one's sense or morals regarding important issue of the day at the sight of some slight profit to be made or some slight advantage to be gained

**将心比，同一理** All minds think alike.

**教不严，师之情** If the teacher is not strict it means that he is lazy. 参见“养不教，父之过”

**狡兔死，走狗烹** After the cunning hare is killed, the hound is boiled. /Ingratitude is the world's reward. /The running dogs are to be cooked when they outlive their usefulness. 参见“飞鸟尽，良弓藏”

**结局好，样样好** All's well that ends well.

**借是友，讨是敌** When you lend sb money, you are his friend; when you ask for the debt, you are his enemy. /Lend will make one lose his friend.

**金钱多，顾虑多** More money, more care.

**今日事，今日毕** Don't put off what should be done today till tomorrow. /Today's work must be done today.

**进可攻，退可守** (of an army) to be placed on a vantage ground so that it can be on the offensive or defensive, as it deems fit

**尽人事，听天命** do one's human best and leave all else to God/do all that is humanly possible and leave the rest to God

**惊天地，泣鬼神** so moving as to startle the heaven and earth and move the ghosts and gods to tears 参见“动天地，泣鬼神”

**经风雨，见世面** face the world and brave the storm/experience wind and rain, and see the ways of the world

**经一事，长一智** Learn from the experiences. /A fall in the pit, a gain

in your wit. /In doing we learn. /Whatever one does, one profits by it. /  
By every experience a person increases his knowledge. 参见“不经一事，  
不长一智”和“吃一堑，长一智”

拒腐蚀，永不沾 resist and never be contaminated by corruption/fight  
corrosive influence and always remain honest

军爱民，民拥军 The army cherishes (loves) the people and the people  
support the army.

## L

拉大旗，作虎皮 drape oneself in the flag to frighten sb/use the great  
banner as a tiger-skin (to cover oneself and intimidate sb)

拉一帮，打一帮 draw in one bunch of people and hit out at another/sup-  
port one section of people in attacking another

来无影，去无踪 come without a trace and leave without a shadow

老不老，自己晓 A man is as old as he feels.

雷声大，雨点小 The thunder is big, the raindrops is small/loud thunder  
but small raindrops/Much cry and little wool/Much talk, little action/All  
talk and no deed/Great boast, small roast. /much said but little done/  
much promise but little performance

冷一句，热一句 one sentence cold and the next hot/make cold and biting  
remarks

里三层，外三层 huge crowds of people/be crowded with people/in or  
with many layers/layer upon layer

礼之用，和为贵 in the application of the rites, harmony is to be prized

立大志，展宏图 cherish high aspirations and carry out a great plan

两头小，中间大 few at each end and many in the middle/small at both  
ends and big in the middle

龙多旱，人多乱 Many dragons lead to a drought and many people create  
confusion.

龙配龙，凤配凤 a dragon matches with a dragon, a phoenix matches with  
a phoenix/let like match with like and kind with kind/let beggars match with  
beggars

龙生龙，凤生凤 Like begets like. /compliment to having unusual sons  
and daughters/a dragon begets a dragon, a phoenix begets a phoenix

捋胳膊，挽袖子 push up one's sleeves

## M

买一个，饶一个 For each one you buy, you get another free.

满招损，谦受益 Humility often gains more than pride. /Complacency

brings losses, while modesty brings benefit. /One loses by pride and gains by modesty. /Pride hurts, modesty benefits. /Fullness invites calamity, humility reaps its reward. /Pride causes decrease, humility brings increase. /The proud shall suffer; the modest succeed.

猫儿眼, 时时变 be as adaptable as a cat's eyes to light

美不美, 家乡水 Sweet or not, it's water from motherland.

瞄得准, 打得狠 aim true and hit hard

明一套, 暗一套 act one way in the open and another way in secret/  
double-dealing 参见“阴一套, 阳一套”

名不正, 言不顺 If names are not right, arguments will not be tenable.

木有本, 水有源 Waters have their sources, trees have their roots—everything has its origin. /Every tree has its roots and every river has its source. 参见“水有源, 树有根”

## N

拿得起, 放得下 be able to advance or retreat/be flexible/be adaptable/  
can take it up or put it down—be adaptable to circumstances

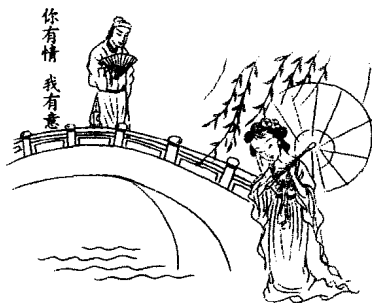
男不男, 女不女 neither fish, flesh nor fowl

男子汉, 大丈夫 a true man/manly

你看我, 我看你 keep looking at one another

你一言, 我一语 to continue bandying words with one another/Everybody contributes their comments one another/Every tongue wags at once. /Everybody joins in the conversation.

你有情, 我有意 You are all heart, and my heart is for you.



女主内, 男主外 The woman takes charge inside the home, while the man handles everything outside.

## P

爬得高, 跌得重 Those who climb high fall heavily. /The higher up, the

greater fall. /The higher one climbs, the heavier the fall (danger of keeping high position).

爬得快, 跌得快 Haste climbers have sudden falls.

爬雪山, 过草地 climb the snow-covered mountains and cross the marshes/scale snow-topped mountains and plod through the marshlands

怕麻烦, 图清静 fear trouble and seek peace and quiet

盼星星, 盼月亮 looking at the stars and the moon, look forward to...

抛头颅, 洒热血 shed blood and lay down lives

破旧俗, 立新风 do away with old customs and introduce new ones/break with outmoded customs and establish new ones

破迷信, 树新风 do away with superstition and establish new customs

铺着地, 盖着天 with only the sky for a cover and the earth for sleeping—have no shelter

## Q

七大姑, 八大姨 seven paternal aunts, eight maternal aunts (cover term for various and sundry relatives)

起五更, 睡半夜 retire at midnight and rise before dawn/get up early and leave off late/work very early and sit up very late

千叮咛, 万嘱咐 urge and exhort sb repeatedly/warn again and again

前怕狼, 后怕虎 fear wolves ahead and tigers behind—to be full of apprehensions or misgivings/nervous and indecisive/always fearing the wolves ahead and the tigers behind

前有车, 后有辙 The wheels of the cart leave their tracks behind. /As one advances, he invariably leaves something behind for others to follow.

钱生钱, 利生利 Money begets money, interest begets interest.

墙头草, 随风倒 grass atop a wall swaying in the wind—a person who follows the crowd/Grass on the top of the wall bends with the wind.

墙有耳, 壁有缝 walls have ears/Even woods have ears.

抢镜头, 出风头 steal the show and be the center of attention/seek the limelight so as to cut a figure

桥是桥, 路是路 The bridge is a bridge, the road is a road. /Black and white can't be confused.

亲不敬, 熟生蔑 If the parents are not respected, familiarity breeds contempt.

亲不亲, 一家人 Blood is thicker than water. /Relatives or not, we are one family.

亲贤臣, 远小人 be near to worthy men and keep away from mean men

亲兄弟, 明算账 Even among brothers, accounts should be settled with-

out ambiguity. /Even brothers keep careful accounts. /Clear reckoning makes long friends. /Money matters should be accounted for even among brothers.

亲一派，疏一派 be warm to one grouping and cold to the other

亲者痛，仇者快 sadden one's own folk (friends) and gladden one's enemies/grieve those near and dear to you and gladden your enemy

勤补拙，俭养廉 Hardworking remedies one's clumsiness, and thriftiness breeds sense of honesty

勤有功，嬉无益 Reward lies ahead of diligence, but nothing is gained by indolence.

青一块，紫一块 be black and blue

穷怕亲，富怕贼 The poor fear kinsmen, the rich fear thieves.

穷则变，变则通 When all means are exhausted, changes become necessary, once changed, a solution emerges. /Necessity is the mother of invention. /Poverty causes change, and change opens the way.

求大同，存小异 seek common ground on major issues while reserving differences on minor ones/seek common ground on major issues while leaving aside the minor differences

求爷爷，告奶奶 plead high and low

## R

人比人，气死人 Comparisons are odious. /It is the comparison that makes men miserable. /It would make you hopping mad if you compare yourself with luckier people.

人不知，鬼不觉 (done) in complete secrecy/without anybody knowing anything about it 参见“神不知，鬼不觉”

人还在，心不死 They (the class enemies) still exist, and they are not reconciled to their defeat.

人是铁，饭是钢 Man is iron but food is steel. /A man may be made of iron but the food makes him strong.

人心齐，泰山移 When people are of one heart, they can make miracles. /When people work with one mind, they can even move Mount Tai-shan. /A united people is invincible. /Many hands make light work.

人要脸，树要皮 Face is as important to man as the bark to the tree.

人有脸，树有皮 All men have faces, as all trees have bark. /Honor to man is like bark to tree.

人有名，树有影 As a tree has its shadow, a man has his name.

人之初，性本善 Man's nature is good at birth. 参见“性相近，习相远”

软的欺，硬的怕    bully the weak and be scared of the strong/bully the weak and give in to the strong

## S

三人知，天下晓    When three know it, all know it. /When something is known to three people, it is public knowledge.

扇阴风，点鬼火    fan the winds of evil and spread the fires of turmoil/fan the flames/stir up trouble/stir up and fan the forces of evil and tyranny/stir up the winds of evil/fan up evil winds and fires

上班来，下班走    do not attend work until the office hours begin, and leave the work as soon as the office hours end

上不上，下不下    be stranded halfway/be in awkward position

上大当，吃大亏    be badly fooled and be suffered severely

上刀山，下火海    climb a mountain of swords or plunge into a sea of flames/lose one's head or shed one's blood

上有老，下有小    have both parents to support and young children to take care of

少花钱，多办事    do more and better with less funds/get more done on less money

舍车马，保将帅    sacrifice the knights in order to save the queen/sacrifice the pawns to save the generals/make minor sacrifices to safeguard major interests

设有福，当共享    If fortune comes our way, we should share it among us.

神不知，鬼不觉    be mysterious without the spirits knowing about it/do in great secret without anybody knowing it/do sth unknown to either god or ghost 参见“人不知，鬼不觉”

胜不骄，败不馁    neither be dizzy with success, nor be discouraged by failure/not puffed up by success, undismayed by failure/be neither overwhelmed by victory, nor discouraged by defeat/neither be dizzy with success nor lose heart because of failure

胜则存，败则亡    Victory was life; defeat, certain death.

识大体，顾大局    Keep the whole situation in mind and give due consideration to what is of paramount importance. /have the cardinal principles in mind and take the overall situation into account/bear the overall situation in mind and put the general interest above all/take the general overall interests into account 也说“顾大局，识大体”

时间紧，任务重    Time is pressing and the task heavy.

士可杀，不可辱    A true scholar prefers death to humiliation. /A scholar would choose death before disgrace.



是则是，非则非 What is right is right, what is wrong is wrong. /Let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay. 参见“对就是对，错就是错”

树雄心，立壮志 foster lofty ideals, set high goals/have lofty aspirations and high aims/aim high and have lofty ambitions

谁出钱，谁点戏 The man who pays the piper calls the tune.

谁投资，谁受益 due benefits to investors/The man who invests gets the benefits.

水有源，树有根 Waters have their sources, trees have their roots. /Every river has a source, every tree has its root. /Everything has its origin. 参见“木有本，水有源”

水中月，镜中花 the moon in the water, the flowers reflected in the mirror/sth within sight but beyond reach/sth unattainable/sth unreal/illusion

说不清，道不明 It is not something that one can explain clearly and make people understand.

说曹操，曹操到 speak of angles and you hear their songs/speak of the devil and he will appear/Talk of the devil, and there he appears.

说大话，使小钱 talk big but spend little

说到哪，做到哪 do what one says/keep one's word/suit the action to the word

说到钱，便无缘 to speak of a loan is to put an end to friendship/to ask for money is to end friendship

说得出，做得到 to mean what one says/to speak and follow through in action/do what one says/whatever one says, goes/live up to what one says/carry out one's pledge 参见“言必信，行必果”

说得多，做得少 talk much but do little

说时迟，那时快 quicker than words can tell/in a twinkling/before one second had passed/at the twinkling of the eye/before one can say Jack Robinson

说一套，做一套 say one thing and do another

说者说，做者做 The dogs bark, but the caravan goes on.

说真话，办实事 speak the truth, do solid work

思悠悠，恨悠悠 endless longing and heart sickness

损大公，肥小私 the pursuit of advantages for one's own unit at the expense of broader interests

损有余，益不足 rational adjustment

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天不怕，地不怕 to defy heaven and earth/There is nothing one fears on